

**Standard 8-3:** The student will demonstrate an understanding of the American Civil War—its causes and effects and the major events that occurred during that time.

**8-3.1** Explain the importance of agriculture in antebellum South Carolina, including plantation life, slavery, and the impact of the cotton gin. (H, G, E)

**Taxonomy Level:** B 2 Understand / Conceptual Knowledge

**Previous/future knowledge:**

In the 3rd grade, students compared the conditions of daily life for various classes of people in South Carolina, including the elite, the middle class, the lower class, the independent farmers, and the free and the enslaved African Americans (3-4.1). Students summarized the institution of slavery prior to the Civil War, that included references to conditions in South Carolina, the invention of the cotton gin, the subsequent expansion of slavery, and economic dependence on slavery (3-4.2).

In the 4th grade, students compared the industrial North and the agricultural South prior to the Civil War, including the specific nature of the economy of each region, the geographic characteristics and boundaries of each region, and the basic way of life in each region (4-6.1).

In 11<sup>th</sup> grade United States history, students will compare economic development in different regions of the country during the early nineteenth century, including agriculture in the South, industry and finance in the North, and the development of new resources in the West (USHC-3.3).

**It is essential for students to know:**

Since colonial times, agriculture was the basis of society in South Carolina. The *headright* method and the availability of slave labor contributed to the establishment of large plantations. By 1860, South Carolina had the highest percentage of slaveholders in the nation. It is important to note that most South Carolinians lived on family or subsistence farms. Most did not own slaves. The majority of slave owners in South Carolina owned only one or two slaves and often worked beside their slaves in the fields. Few slave owners owned large plantations. However, the economic, social and political systems in South Carolina were based on the institution of slavery.

In 1793 Eli Whitney invented the **cotton gin** and South Carolina farmers had a new cash crop. As a result they planted more cotton to increase profits and became even more dependent on slave labor. Although slave importation (*international* slave trade ) was outlawed in 1808, the slave population continued to grow in antebellum South Carolina. With ready markets in the textile mills of the North and in England, planters sold cotton at good prices and both southern planters and northern mill owners acquired great wealth either directly or indirectly due to slave labor. Although planting cotton eventually wore out the soil, planters were hesitant to find new crops and as a result moved to new lands. The need for new lands played into southern arguments for the westward expansion of slavery.

**Plantation life** required self sustaining communities and depended on the institution of slavery for the production of goods and services needed to support plantations. Slaves did the work in the fields and in the plantation houses. They cleared the land, planted, cultivated, harvested and processed the crop, working from dawn to dusk six days a week. Women and children worked in the fields alongside the men

under the supervision of a driver or an overseer. Slaves also had a diverse range of skills and might be hired out by the master who would collect the slave's wages. Other slaves worked in the owners' homes, cooking, cleaning, doing laundry and raising the owners' children. Since slave owners had a large financial investment in slaves, they were concerned about their property and therefore some treated their slaves comparatively well, while others were brutal. Although the treatment of slaves might vary from

one owner to another, slaves were consistently denied their freedom and forced to work long hours.. Slaves had little time to tend to their own families or to the plots that owners might allow them to cultivate for their own food. They were provided with a minimum of food, clothing, and shelter. Since the law did not recognize slave marriages, families were often separated through sale because of changes in the slave owner's family or finances. The law also forbade teaching a slave to read and write.

Slaves lived in small cabins with dirt floors not far from the Big House so they could remain under the watchful eye of the master. Slaves were constantly monitored to ensure that they did not run away. If they left the plantation, they had to carry a pass. Patrollers roamed the roads on constant watch for escaping slaves. Runaways were pursued and punished harshly when they were captured. Although there were a few slave revolts, the great majority of slaves were forced to confine their protests to work slow downs, surreptitious destruction of the master's property, and feigned illnesses. Although slaves were often separated from family members through sale, they created extended family ties and found some solace in religion. African Americans converted to Christianity and attended the white controlled church where they heard the preacher tell them that they should be content with their place in the world. However, in secret prayer meetings and in their spirituals, they placed a strong emphasis on freedom.

The **Plantation** system dominated South Carolina society and politics. The strict class system in South Carolina was based on slavery. The planter elite enjoyed great wealth, social position and political influence as a result of their dependence on slave labor. But plantation life for the slave owners was also hard work. Most goods were produced on the plantation and both the master and the mistress had responsibilities for making the plantation work. Sometimes overseers would be hired but all business decisions including the marketing of the crops and the managing of the slave population was the responsibility of the master. The mistress oversaw the running of the house and sometimes cared for slaves when they were sick. Such actions led southerners to justify slavery as a 'positive good.' However, a system that rested on force required constant vigilance. Slave owners lived in constant fear that their slaves would rise up against them. These fears were fanned by the Denmark Vesey plot uncovered in Charleston. Unlike the Stono rebellion, this plot never materialized but, like the Stono Rebellion, it also led to stricter control over slaves and free blacks.

**It is not essential for students to know:**

Students do not need to know specific plantation names or numbers of slaves held or profit generated at these plantations.

**Assessment guidelines:**

Appropriate assessments would require students to **explain** the importance of agriculture and plantation life in antebellum South Carolina. Students should be able to **explain** the impact of the cotton gin on the institution of slavery. They should be able to **compare** the impact that slavery had on the planters and on the slaves.